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SECRETUnited States Mission Berlin,
Berlin-Dahlem.

November 19, 1959.

Dear Martin:

We have read with great interest your letter of November 10
about high altitude flights.

The Mission understands that the C-130 flights last spring were undertaken primarily to provide the necessary precedent to back up our position in the altitude controversy--and the altitude requirements of a possible future airlift were foremost in mind. The C-130 flights were eminently successful in achieving this purpose. Re-achievement would seem unnecessary.

If, however, the purpose now is to open the way for high altitude flights on a regular basis so that commercial jets can use the corridors--and we gather such is the purpose--then we would say the time is as ripe as it is ever likely to be and the first step should be negotiations with the Soviets on the matter.

We are aware that there have been no negotiations with the Soviets on corridor altitudes since 1948--that our position has been there are no altitude limitations and therefore nothing to negotiate about. But the fact is, it is highly unlikely the airlines will fly above 10,000 feet unless the Soviets "guarantee flight safety." It would seem that the only way to achieve this is to negotiate with the Soviets.

Were C-130 flights to be resumed before such negotiations, this would, we think, greatly lessen our chances of getting an agreement. There is no reason to think the pattern of last spring would not be repeated: the Soviets would refuse to initial the flight plans, the C-130's would be harassed by Soviet Air Force planes, etc. Even if the C-130's are not harassed, no number of successful C-130 flights would, the Mission strongly suspects, persuade the airlines to follow suit with flights above 10,000 feet if the Soviets refuse to initial the flight plans.

In any negotiations with the Soviets on altitude, the three Western powers should of course strictly reserve their position that they recognize no altitude limitation in the corridors--the negotiation would be framed as a purely technical affair to work out the details

Martin J. Hillenbrand, Esquire,
Director, Office of German Affairs,
Department of State,
Washington, D.C.

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of air safety. To emphasize the technical aspect of the discussions, we suggest Berlin be the site of the discussions, using routine channels.

We are glad that you think well of the suggestion to make reasonable provision for cross-corridor traffic (see, too, our airgram G-108, November 10, 1959).

We agree with you that the French and British might well be disposed to go along at this time in an effort to break through what is in fact if not in theory the 10,000 foot barrier. Air France is putting pressure on their Government to be permitted to fly jets, and for competitive reasons BEA and PAA may be expected soon to do likewise, if they have not done so already. The Deputy French Political Adviser indicated the other day his Government is considering an approach to the British and us to open the matter of altitude with the Soviets. For the British attitude, see our G-121, November 18, 1959.

We think that technical discussions with the Soviets--and this is the proper term for what we have in mind rather than "negotiations"--stand at least an even chance of success. The Soviets may figure they can get mileage out of being reasonable at this time. And they could be made to appear most unreasonable if they were to condemn West Berlin to DC-4 traffic in perpetuity. For what it is worth, when the U.S. Controller passed the flight plan of the first C-130 last spring, the Soviet Controller suggested that the general question of altitude be discussed (Ourtel 827 of March 27, 1959).

The real kicker is what do we do if the negotiation is unsuccessful. The Mission recognizes that no matter how much we reserve our position on altitude and keep the discussion within a technical air safety framework, the fact we deal with the Soviets at all on this subject implies we recognize they do after all have a say in the matter. The Mission thinks there is an antidote to an unsuccessful negotiation, and that is resumption of C-130 flights. The flights will likely be riskier in the event of failure of negotiations on altitude, but they will be all the more necessary if we are not to forfeit our position on this issue--and this we cannot afford to do so long as there remains the possibility we might someday have to mount another airlift.

It may be difficult to persuade the British and French to support C-130 flights in this event, but we feel that there should be no entering into of negotiations with the Soviets in the absence of a prior decision on what to do in the event the Soviets turn us down.

As requested in your letter, we will keep you informed on any developments relating to this general question.

Sincerely,


E. Allan Lightner, Jr.

cc: Mr. William Tyler, Bonn.
Mr. Walter Radius, Bonn.

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